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Cross-Cultural Leadership: What We Know, What We Need to Know, and Where We Need to Go

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Keywords

cross-cultural, leadership, culture dimensions, comparative research

Abstract

While leadership is an important way to coordinate around the globe, societal culture may shape leadership processes and their effects. In this review, we discuss conceptualizations of culture and address what is known about the role culture plays in shaping leadership processes. For example, societal culture shapes people's implicit theories of leadership, and these affect how leaders and followers behave toward each other. Also, culture can moderate the relationship between leadership and important outcomes. We review research done in these areas as well as research on emerging topics in the field, such as followership across cultures and leading groups of employees who are from different areas of the world. As we review the findings of the literature to date, we also acknowledge some of the problems and methodological challenges faced in this field and discuss practical implications and areas for future research.

INTRODUCTION

While leadership exists around the world, what is seen as effective leader behavior may vary, at least in part, across cultures (House et al. 1999). With the increasing globalization and the growth of international business, understanding how to effectively lead in different countries or bring together staff from different countries is important and has become a topic of interest for both management scholars and practitioners. Together, leadership scholars from 38 different countries have defined leadership as "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (House et al. 2004, p. 15). Although these experts agreed on how to define leadership, cultural differences do still lead to varying interpretations of specific leadership terminology and enactment. While several earlier reviews have outlined the complexities of cross-cultural leadership (e.g., Den Hartog et al. 1999, Dickson et al. 2003, House et al. 2014), our review of the current literature, focusing on research from the last decade, reveals that while progress has been made, a lot remains unclear.

We review what we know about how culture may shape leadership processes and their effects. For example, research shows that societal culture shapes people's perceptions and expectations of leaders, that is, their implicit theories of leadership (e.g., Hanges et al. 2000, Javidan et al. 2006), and while certain leadership attributes are universally endorsed by followers, others are culturally contingent. Culture also influences how leaders and followers behave toward each other (e.g., Urbach et al. 2021). Additionally, culture can interact with leadership to impact specific outcomes (e.g., Watts et al. 2020). We review research done in these areas as well as research on emerging topics in the field, such as identity leadership and what is known about leading groups of employees who are from different areas in the world.

As we review the findings of the literature to date, it is important to acknowledge the problems faced in this complex field. Despite the growing popularity of research on cross-cultural leadership and the numerous findings emphasizing the important role of culture, there are still many unresolved difficulties. Some issues are not unique to cross-cultural leadership research and affect the broader field of leadership studies, such as the tendency to group together leader behaviors that are conceptually unrelated (Fischer & Sitkin 2023), endogeneity issues (Antonakis et al. 2010), or the confounding of operationalizations of leadership with its effects (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin 2013). However, other key challenges, such as those related to measurement equivalence and sampling, are more specific to cross-cultural leadership research. For instance, obtaining data from different cultural contexts can be challenging, and thus many researchers focus on comparing only two countries. However, if culture is the contextual variable of interest, it is important to include a diverse range of countries or cultural backgrounds to ensure the validity of the results (Gelfand et al. 2004).

Brockner (2003) argues that not only is it important to demonstrate that there is a difference between cultures, but also it is crucial to account for the reason a difference occurs by operationalizing the proposed psychological mechanisms involved, which often does not happen in cross-cultural research. We discuss several such issues the field struggles with when reviewing the literature. The messy and fragmented state of the field can undermine the usefulness and impact of research findings and can make it somewhat difficult to formulate practical, evidence-based advice. We need to know what we know, what we don't know, and where we need to go to enhance our understanding. The goal of this article is therefore to examine the current state of the field and bring together findings to establish a foundation for future research that can provide a stronger evidence base to inform both theory and practice.

Our examination of the cross-cultural leadership literature is organized in six sections. First, we discuss conceptualizations of culture. Next, we turn to the research on leadership across societal

cultures and start by reviewing how culture dimensions affect what people expect of leaders and how leader behavior is shaped by such culture-based expectations. We then review the work on leadership styles and discuss whether culture dimensions act as moderators in the relationship between such styles and work outcomes. We continue by discussing some upcoming areas in the research on leadership and culture as well as areas for future research. Next, we highlight some of the methodological challenges in such research, and we conclude by discussing some implications for practice.

CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE

Culture is a system of meaning that shapes how individuals understand and interpret the world around them (House et al. 1997). It provides a shared framework, consisting of joint value orientations as well as beliefs and assumptions about the nature of people, relationships, the environment, time, and activities (e.g., Adler 2002, Hofstede 2001, Nardon & Steers 2009, Schwartz 1999). Culture develops as groups come together to solve problems of adapting to the environment and coordinating among members. It helps group members to understand and respond to personal experiences and social, economic, and political events. The shared beliefs are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems, and they guide people's behaviors and reactions (Schein 1992).

One way to approach the study of leadership and culture is by linking dimensions of culture to leadership. There are several popular cultural dimension frameworks, including those of Hofstede (1980, 2001) and GLOBE (House et al. 2004), as well as Schwartz's (1994) cultural values and Gelfand's (2019) tight–loose cultural orientation. **Table 1** presents an overview and descriptions of Hofstede's, GLOBE's, Schwartz's, and Gelfand's dimensions.

Hofstede's (1980) four (and later five) cultural dimensions have been widely used to understand cross-cultural differences in values and beliefs. Similarly, GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions (House et al. 2004) are widely used. Schwartz's cultural values are intended to measure the underlying motivations for behavior across cultures. Gelfand's (2019) tight–loose cultural orientation focuses on the extent to which societies have strong norms and rules that govern behavior (tight) or are more permissive and flexible (loose). Tight cultures tend to have low tolerance for deviation from norms and may have stricter laws and regulations, while loose cultures may have more relaxed social norms and be more accepting of deviant behavior.

While these frameworks overlap somewhat, they each offer a unique perspective on cross-cultural differences and can be useful for understanding different aspects of cultural variation. As illustrated in different commentaries (e.g., Peterson & Søndergaard 2011, Smith 2006, Tung & Stahl 2018), each of these frameworks has distinctive strengths but also limitations. Critics, for example, have challenged Hofstede's (1980, 2001) assumption of a static and unchanging concept of national culture, criticized his framework's tendency to overestimate the number of dimensions and potentially misinterpret their significance, and questioned its reliance on potentially outdated data (Ailon 2008; Baskerville 2003; Baskerville-Morley 2005; Fang 2003; McSweeney 2002, 2009; Taras et al. 2012; Venaik & Brewer 2010, 2016). However, Hofstede's original framework has been modified by analyzing geographical areas larger than countries and by using alternative ways to represent culture dimensions. Hofstede's work continues to be widely used in cross-cultural management (see Beugelsdijk et al. 2017 for an overview).

Cultural differences are often attributed to differences in values, drawing on frameworks proposed by Hofstede (1980, 2001) and Schwartz (1999). While values are an important aspect of culture, they may not fully capture the richness and diversity of cultural experiences, expressions, and norms. Cultural values often reflect the ideals and aspirations of a society, but they may not necessarily align with the day-to-day realities of how people behave or the nuances of cultural

Table 1 Culture models and their dimensions

Culture model	Dimension/value
Hofstede (2001), Hofstede et al. (2010)	
Power distance	The extent to which people in a culture accept and expect unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations.
Masculinity versus femininity	The extent to which a culture values traditional masculine traits like competitiveness and assertiveness versus more feminine traits like cooperation and nurturing.
Individualism versus collectivism	The extent to which people in a culture prioritize their individual needs and goals over the needs of the group or community.
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which people in a culture feel uncomfortable with ambiguity, uncertainty, and change.
Long-term versus short-term orientation	The extent to which a culture values long-term planning, thrift, and persistence over short-term gratification.
Indulgence versus restraint	The extent to which a culture values gratification and pleasure seeking versus restraint and self-discipline.
GLOBE (House et al. 2004)	
Power distance	The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.
Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events.
Human orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.
Collectivism I (institutional collectivism)	The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.
Collectivism II (in-group collectivism)	The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in regard to their organizations or families.
Assertiveness	The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others.
Gender egalitarianism	The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.
Future orientation	The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.
Performance orientation	The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.
Schwartz (2012)	
Conservation	The value of self-restriction, orderliness, and resistance to change.
Conformity	The value of restraining actions, inclinations, and impulses that might harm or disturb others or violate social expectations or norms.
Tradition	The value of respecting and preserving cultural and historical traditions, customs, and beliefs.
Security	The value of seeking safety, stability, and protection from threats or harm.
Openness to change	The value of self-direction, creativity, and readiness for change.
Self-direction	The value of pursuing personal goals, autonomy, and creativity.
Stimulation	The value of seeking new experiences, novelty, and excitement.
Self-enhancement	The value of self-promotion and pursuit of personal success.
Achievement	The value of striving for personal success and excellence.
Power	The value of seeking control or dominance over people and resources.
Self-transcendence	The value of feeling concern for others and the larger world.
Universalism	The value of promoting social justice, equality, and welfare for all people.

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Culture model	Dimension/value
Benevolence	The value of seeking to enhance the welfare of others, especially those in need or close to oneself.
Spirituality	The value of seeking a spiritual or transcendent understanding of the universe and of one's place in it.
Gelfand (2019)	
Tight–loose cultural orientation	The degree to which societies can be categorized as either tightly controlled, with strong norms and regulations, or loosely structured, with more flexibility and permissiveness.

practices (Tung & Stahl 2018). The GLOBE research project builds on this by examining not only cultural values (i.e., people's views on how things should be) but also cultural practices (i.e., people's views on how things currently are). By studying cultural practices in addition to values, GLOBE tried to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational dynamics (House et al. 2004).

Project GLOBE has been influential despite several noteworthy limitations. The validity of some of GLOBE's cultural dimensions has been questioned, with some critics arguing that they are not sufficiently distinct from one another or overlap with other constructs. For example, McCrae et al. (2008) and Smith (2006) argue that certain items within the GLOBE scales prompt participants to express their opinions about local customs and typical traits associated with their culture. Thus, some of the GLOBE scales may (in part) reflect stereotypes rather than actual cultural dimensions. The construct validity of the GLOBE framework was also called into question due to the inverse correlations found between its value and practice dimensions (Maseland & van Hoorn 2009, 2010; Taras et al. 2010). The pattern of correlations between the GLOBE dimensions and some of Hofstede's similarly defined dimensions is also not always easy to interpret. Nevertheless, GLOBE is currently one of the most frequently employed cultural frameworks in cross-cultural research.

Schwartz's (1999) value survey research began as an examination of personal values and involved a comparison between personal values and societal values. Interestingly, differences are often found between correlations at the individual and the societal level. These differences in correlations may suggest a conceptual gap between the values held by a society and those held by individuals, but the exact nature of this gap is often left unexplained (Peterson & Søndergaard 2011).

Cultural frameworks typically conceptualize culture at the national or societal level and assume that such culture is homogeneous (e.g., Boyacigiller et al. 2004). However, culture at this level is not necessarily homogeneous. While there may be some shared values, beliefs, and norms within a particular nation, there is also significant diversity within nations. This is due to a variety of factors, including regional variations, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, and individual differences (Taras et al. 2016). For example, in the United States, there are distinct cultural differences between regions, such as the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West. There are also differences in cultural values and norms based on factors such as race/ethnicity, religion, political views, and socioeconomic status. This is also seen in other countries, especially large ones such as India, with its many different languages and its different ethnic groups and religions. Sometimes, then, alternative cultural groupings—notably, within-country cultural regions—might be more useful than a focus on the country as a whole. Also, globalization and increased cultural exchange have led to the spread of global cultural influences, such as through media and technology, that can further complicate the idea of a homogeneous national culture. Culture is not a static concept, and cultural values and practices can change over time in response to social, economic, and political factors

Table 2 Comparison of cultural country clusters based on the GLOBE Framework (Gupta & Hanges 2004) and cultural zones identified through meta-analysis (Ronen & Shenkar 2013)

GLOBE country clusters (Gupta & Hanges 2004)	Cultural zones as defined by Ronen & Shenkar (2013)
Anglo: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa (white sample), United Kingdom, United States	Anglo: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States
Latin Europe: France, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (French-speaking)	Latin Europe: Belgium, France, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (French-speaking)
Confucian Asia: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan	Confucian: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan
Nordic Europe: Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Nordic: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden
Germanic Europe: Austria, Germany (former East), Germany (former West), the Netherlands, Switzerland	Germanic: Austria, Germany, Switzerland
Eastern Europe: Albania, Czech Republic, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Slovenia	East Europe: Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine
Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela	Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Uruguay, Venezuela
Sub-Saharan Africa: Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa (black sample), Zambia, Zimbabwe	African: Nigeria, South Africa
Middle East: Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Turkey	Near East: Greece, Turkey
—	Arab: Kuwait, Morocco, United Arab Emirates
Southern Asia: India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand	Far East: India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Zimbabwe

(Gelfand et al. 2017, Tung & Stahl 2018). In sum, the conceptualization of culture is complex and multifaceted, and understanding cultural differences presents many challenges (for an overview, see Tung & Stahl 2018).

Culture Clusters

Researchers have grouped cultures into clusters based on their similarity. Such similarity often occurs in geographic regions but is also due to institutional pressures. According to Peterson & Barreto (2015), countries with a history of close ties, whether through proximity, trade, conquest, or religion, tend to exhibit more similar cultural values. **Table 2** shows countries that are grouped together based on their scores on the GLOBE dimensions (column 1) (Gupta & Hanges 2004). However, there are other groupings based on other frameworks, and the categorization of cultures into clusters is not consistent (Dickson et al. 2011). For instance, while Hofstede (1980) categorized The Netherlands as part of Nordic Europe, the GLOBE study sees it as a Germanic country (Gupta & Hanges 2004, Gupta et al. 2002). To try and synthesize the clustering of countries, Ronen & Shenkar (2013) conducted an empirical analysis of major culture-clustering studies. They grouped 70 countries into 11 global clusters (see **Table 2**, column 2). Beugelsdijk et al. (2017) provide a clustering of 40 countries that takes into account how these countries score on a combination of the GLOBE, Hofstede, and Schwartz measures. This approach shows notable similarities with Ronen & Shenkar's (2013) analysis, although a few countries again are clustered differently. Moreover, significant differences persist between the countries within clusters, which makes some of the comparisons at the cluster level somewhat general.

Universality Versus Cross-Cultural Differences

Developing understanding about how leadership differs across cultures often focuses on identifying which leadership characteristics or behaviors are universal or valid around the world and which are country or culture specific (e.g., Bass 1997, Den Hartog et al. 1999, House et al. 2004). House et al. (1997) advanced three theoretical perspectives (near universality, cultural congruence, and cultural compensation) explaining how cultural factors might influence the effectiveness of leader traits and behaviors. These propositions can help structure and comprehend cross-cultural research findings.

First, the near universality proposition posits that certain leader characteristics and behaviors are (nearly) universally accepted and deemed effective. This proposition essentially represents a null hypothesis regarding the influence of culture on leadership. For instance, there is a universal expectation that leaders should embody qualities such as fairness, honesty, and integrity (House et al. 2004).

Second, the cultural congruence proposition posits that culture affects which kinds of leader behavior are usually accepted, enacted, and deemed effective in societies. This proposition is based on the idea that leaders who adapt their behaviors to fit the cultural norms and values of their followers are likely to be more effective than those who do not. Behaviors that are in line with the values held by the society will be more acceptable and effective than behaviors that go against these. If leaders violate cultural norms, this may even have negative consequences. In line with this, some work that we discuss below suggests that fit between certain leader characteristics and culture is effective (e.g., House et al. 2014).

Finally, there is the cultural difference or cultural compensation proposition, which suggests that leaders can also sometimes be effective by showing behaviors that differ from how things are usually done in society. This may require careful consideration: When is such leader behavior perceived as helpful, and when is it assessed to be too distant from followers' expectations and deemed ineffective? For some outcomes, by being different, the leader can introduce change and a fresh perspective on how followers could pursue goals, which may be helpful to improve performance or stimulate innovation. Effective leader behaviors or role modeling may thus sometimes compensate for weaknesses or gaps in the prevailing cultural norms and values of a group (House et al. 1997, Rockstuhl et al. 2023). This idea is consistent with Kerr & Jermier's (1978) substitute for leadership theory, where leader characteristics can substitute for the impact of culture on follower outcomes. Some work suggests that such compensation can occur (e.g., Ernst et al. 2022, Watts et al. 2020).

While these three perspectives receive some support (e.g., Crede et al. 2019, House et al. 2004), it is important to acknowledge that the distinction between universality and cultural contingency is not clear-cut and unequivocal. One can ask the question, What is universality? Lonner (1980) differentiated between so-called simple universals, variform universals, and functional universals. Simple universals imply that there are aspects of human behavior or characteristics that apply globally and to all, such as the human need to communicate and connect with others. Variform universals occur everywhere yet are subtly different in different cultures—for example, the universal human need to communicate may take somewhat different forms. Thus, while the principle is the same, there is a variation in terms of its enactment in different cultures. Functional universals refer to the stability of the relationships between phenomena found across cultures. For example, according to Bass (1997), a consistent negative relationship exists between laissez-faire leadership and perceptions of leader effectiveness across cultures. This suggests that there might be a functional universal principle at play: Leaders who are passive and neglect their leadership responsibilities tend to be perceived as ineffective. Although this relationship tends to hold everywhere, the strength of this relationship might vary across cultures.

Bass (1997) even goes one step further and extends the concept of universals by introducing variform functional universals. In these, both the strength of the relationship between constructs and their behavioral expression may vary somewhat across cultures, yet the behavior serves the same function everywhere. Bass (1997) illustrates variform universals with the example that the strength of the relationship between transformational leader behaviors and effectiveness, as well as the specific enactment of the behaviors seen as transformational, may vary across cultures. For example, transformational leaders might be more or less participative, and the relationship between their behaviors and effectiveness can be stronger or weaker. However, regardless of the cultural variations in the enactment or strength of this relationship with effectiveness, transformational leadership everywhere serves the overarching function of inspiring and improving follower performance. Therefore, the function (e.g., inspiring, improving performance) remains consistent even though the way it is achieved may vary across cultures. One might question whether this can still be interpreted as a universal, given that so much variation exists.

Given the various interpretations of the concepts of universal or culturally contingent, the operationalization of the constructs under investigation is important. When constructs possess broader and more abstract characteristics, they are often perceived in a somewhat more universal manner, while constructs that are more specific and concrete are more likely to exhibit variations across different situations and cultures. As Dickson et al. (2012) point out, it can be a problem for cross-cultural leadership researchers if there is no clear understanding of what the focus of the study is (e.g., universality or cultural contingency and what is meant by this term), because depending on the focus, methodologies and interpretations are likely to differ. For example, the abstract construct of providing support to followers may be universally valued around the world as an important leadership function and can in that sense be seen as universal. However, exactly how leaders should enact providing support may differ from culture to culture, and thus these differences could be interpreted as a cross-cultural difference or as a variform universal depending on the researchers' theoretical focus. In other words, depending on the specificity of the theory and behavioral measurement used, the conclusions are likely to differ, and a choice is needed depending on the focus of the study. Below, we address how and when research findings align with concepts such as (near) universality (including functional or variform universality), cultural fit, or cultural compensation.

CULTURE AND EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERS

Why and how should we expect culture to influence leadership processes and their effects? The GLOBE research project focuses on this question. The project started by studying perceptions of outstanding leadership around the world—in other words, by asking, Do implicit leadership theories (ILTs) differ across cultures, or are they similar around the world? ILTs are cognitive structures that guide individuals' processing of leader characteristics and facilitate inferences about likely leader behaviors and outcomes (e.g., Lord et al. 2020). Early research suggested ILTs are likely to differ across cultures. For example, Gerstner & Day (1994) examined ILTs in eight different countries (France, Germany, Honduras, India, Taiwan, China, Japan, and the United States), finding significant cross-cultural differences. They found that the characteristics people considered to be most (as well as moderately and least) typical of business leaders in their context varied by culture.

The GLOBE research built on this work, and in the first phase of the project it studied both cultural dimensions and the ILTs held in different cultures (see House et al. 2004 for a full description). Over 16,000 middle managers from 62 cultures participated. Questions the project sought to answer included, Which characteristics are universally seen as effective for

leaders across cultures, and which vary across cultures? Are there culturally endorsed ILTs? And to what extent can we predict the leader characteristics that are seen as effective in a culture based on that culture's cultural dimension scores? The second phase of the project (see, e.g., House et al. 2014) studied the relationship of organizational leaders' behavior with culturally endorsed ILTs. The question here was, Are leaders who are seen to behave in line with such ILTs more effective? Thus, GLOBE addressed both the aforementioned near universality and cultural fit ideas.

Universally positively endorsed leadership characteristics that are seen as contributing to outstanding leadership (nearly) everywhere include being trustworthy, just, honest, inspirational, visionary, foresightful, dynamic, encouraging, positive, motivational, confidence builder, team builder, communicator, coordinator, excellence oriented, decisive, intelligent, and win–win problem solver. Many of these universally endorsed characteristics reflect charismatic/transformational or moral styles of leadership. There are also characteristics that followers universally see as undesirable for leaders, such as being ruthless, irritable, and dictatorial and being a loner. Such characteristics seem to reflect more abusive or harmful forms of leadership. Many of these universally endorsed and universally undesirable traits share similarities with characteristics that other ILT research has also shown to be highly prototypical or anti-prototypical. For example, in their work on ILTs, Epitropaki & Martin (2005) showed that the leadership prototype includes characteristics related to sensitivity, intelligence, dedication, and dynamism, and the leadership anti-prototype includes characteristics related to tyranny and masculinity.

In addition, many leader characteristics in the GLOBE study were culturally contingent, that is, strongly endorsed in some cultures but not in others (see Den Hartog et al. 1999). These culturally contingent characteristics can be related to power and status, individualism, communication, conflict, emotionality, and risk management. For instance, attributes like being sensitive, class conscious, and autonomous can have markedly different cultural importance and effectiveness ratings, illustrating the diversity of perceptions across countries.

In the GLOBE research, these item-level leadership attributes were next statistically grouped into 21 first-order dimensions that were consolidated into 6 second-order global leadership dimensions (see Hanges & Dickson 2004, 2006). These global dimensions are charismatic/value-based leadership (e.g., inspirational, visionary, just), team-oriented leadership (e.g., integrating, collaborative, and diplomatic), humane leadership (e.g., modest, tolerant, and sensitive), participative leadership (e.g., nonautocratic and allowing participation in decision making), autonomous leadership (e.g., individualistic, independent, and unique), and self-protective leadership (e.g., self-centered, status conscious). Culturally endorsed ILT profiles were created for all 62 cultures and 10 culture clusters (see first column of **Table 2**) using the six leadership dimensions. These culturally endorsed profiles reflect the shared beliefs and expectations about leadership within a given culture and are referred to as culturally endorsed leadership theories (CLTs).

These CLT profiles highlight some elements of leadership perceived to be culturally common or universal as well as some that are culturally unique (see Dorfman et al. 2004). For example, the charismatic and team-oriented leadership dimensions were strongly endorsed in all culture clusters and thus seem to have universal appeal. Humane leadership contributed somewhat to outstanding leadership everywhere, but it was far less strongly endorsed on average across all countries. Participative leadership was reported to contribute to effective leadership in many countries (e.g., Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands) but less so in others (e.g., Turkey, Greece, and Russia). Autonomous leadership was mostly neutral in relation to effective leadership, but for some of the 62 cultures (and clusters) it contributed slightly and for some others it inhibited slightly. The self-protective dimension was an inhibitor everywhere, although there were differences in the strength of this perception (see, e.g., Dorfman et al. 2004).

GLOBE 2013 Study

GLOBE also identified the correlation between CLTs and culture dimensions, exploring how these dimensions related to the shared beliefs and expectations about leadership in a given culture. For example, the performance orientation was related to charismatic/value-based leadership and participative leadership at both the organizational and societal levels of culture. Thus, when a strong performance orientation is valued, people tend to want charismatic leaders with visions of an ambitious and exciting future (cultural fit). They also value team orientation, that is, leaders who collaborate with others in building this future.

While based on a large data set of over 16,000 respondents and including over 60 cultures, it is important to note that these conclusions are based on a single study (House et al. 2004). Importantly, GLOBE studied both societal and organizational culture, and in many cases the impact of organizational culture on the leadership belief system (i.e., CLT) was at least as strong as that of societal culture, if not stronger (Dorfman et al. 2004). **Table 3** provides an overview of GLOBE's CLT dimensions and their endorsement, and it summarizes the effectiveness of behaviors related to these dimensions studied in the second phase of GLOBE.

In the second GLOBE study (see House et al. 2014), the aim was to build further on the expected leader characteristics and behaviors found in the first study (i.e., CLTs) and test whether leadership success depends on CEOs' matching their way of leading to such societal expectations (i.e., cultural fit). In this study, over 70 researchers collected new survey and interview data from over 1,000 CEOs as well as survey data from over 5,000 senior managers in the top management team (TMT) that reported directly to these CEOs in organizations across 24 countries. First, the study tested whether there were CEO leader behaviors that around the world were related to the effectiveness of TMTs and organizational performance (i.e., universal). Among the six global dimensions of CEO leadership behavior (scales for these leader behaviors were developed based on the six CLTs of phase 1), CEO charismatic leadership behavior was consistently the most impactful leadership behavior in relation to TMT dedication and organizational performance. Team-oriented behavior was the next most important global leadership behavior, followed by human-oriented leadership. Autonomous and self-protective leaderships tend to be ineffective. Participative behavior was moderately positively related to these outcomes overall. These results are summarized in **Table 3**.

Next, the main hypothesis of the GLOBE CEO study was that the congruence or fit between CEOs' leader behavior and their society's CLT would predict effectiveness. Thus, the researchers hypothesized that societal cultural values would directly affect both societal leadership expectations (CLTs) and CEO leadership behaviors, and, in turn, these would relate to indicators of effectiveness. The results show that cultural values only indirectly predict leader behavior through the culturally endorsed leadership expectation. Societal values themselves did not directly predict CEOs' leader behaviors. These findings are summarized in **Figure 1**.

Leaders seem to learn what is expected in a culture and then tend to operate in socially desirable ways. For instance, in cultures that value performance orientation (a major cultural dimension) such as the United States and Germany, people expect leaders to be participative, and indeed leaders there showed some of the highest levels of participative leadership. Thus, CEO behavior tends to fit with the cultural expectations of leadership. These findings reinforce the importance of CEOs to organizational effectiveness–related outcomes, highlight the influence of culture on societal leadership expectations, and suggest the importance of matching CEO behaviors to the leadership expectations within a society. When behavior matches the CLT, TMT dedication and firm competitive performance are higher. This is in line with the idea of cultural congruence (see House et al. 2014).

Table 3 GLOBE leadership dimensions and their cross-cultural effectiveness (adapted from Javidan et al. 2006)

Leadership dimension	Description	Endorsement of the dimension in phase 1 (House et al. 2004)	Cross-cultural effectiveness of the behavior in terms of the relationship with top management team dedication and organizational performance in phase 2 (House et al. 2014)
Charismatic/ value based	Instilling inspiration, driving motivation, and expecting exceptional performance, all grounded in firmly held core convictions.	Universally endorsed; particularly strongly endorsed by the Anglo cluster.	Universally most effective
Team oriented	Focusing on fostering team cohesion and ensuring the successful pursuit of a shared objective or target by all team members.	Universally endorsed	Universally effective
Participative	Involving others in making and implementing decisions.	Generally endorsed but more strongly so by Germanic Europe, Anglo, and Nordic Europe clusters and somewhat less so by Middle East, Eastern Europe, Confucian Asia, and Southern Asia clusters.	Overall moderately effective
Human oriented	Embodying support, consideration, compassion, and generosity.	Variation in endorsement, varying from neutral to moderately contributing to outstanding leadership; particularly endorsed by Southern Asia, Anglo, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Confucian Asia clusters.	Overall moderately effective
Autonomous	Being individualistic, independent, and unique.	Variation in endorsement, varying from impeding to slightly facilitating outstanding leadership; rejected by Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, Latin Europe, and Latin America clusters and somewhat more endorsed by Eastern Europe and Germanic clusters.	Tended to be ineffective
Self-protective	Being self-centered, status conscious, and face saving.	Universally undesirable; viewed slightly less negatively in the Confucian Asia and Southern Asia clusters.	Tended to be ineffective

Examples of Other Studies Using GLOBE Data or Combining Them with Other Data

Several studies have used GLOBE data or combined them with other data to test their hypotheses. For example, Brodbeck et al. (2000) used the GLOBE data from 22 countries in Europe and focused on differences in CLTs in Europe's different regions. Aktas et al. (2016) combined GLOBE's

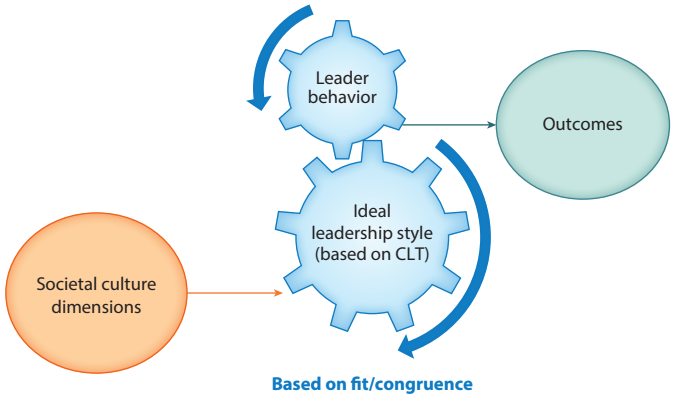

Figure 1

Findings of the 2014 GLOBE study, showing no direct link between culture and leader behavior and an indirect link via (fit with) culturally endorsed leadership theory (CLT).

CLTs with the work on cultural tightness and looseness by Gelfand et al. (2011). As noted, tight societies are very formal and have clearly defined norms. Deviating from these is sanctioned. Loose societies have a lack of formality and discipline and a high tolerance for deviant behavior. Aktas et al.'s (2016) study combined Gelfand et al.'s (2011) country-level tightness scores with the GLOBE data on CLT dimensions (House et al. 2004) for 29 countries. They proposed that tight societies would endorse strong, autocratic, and autonomous leaders who do not rely on others, whereas in loose cultures, leaders would be expected to be more open to change, innovation, and input from others, and thus these cultures might endorse charismatic and more participative leaders. Partially in line with their hypotheses and the idea of cultural congruence, they showed that cultural tightness is positively related to the endorsement of autonomous leadership and negatively related to the endorsement of charismatic and team-oriented leadership at both the societal and organizational levels of analysis, even when controlling for several culture dimensions.

Building on GLOBE, Aycan et al. (2013) argue that cultural context not only affects prototypes of ideal leadership (i.e., CLTs) but also influences the relationships among leadership prototypes. They specifically addressed the paternalistic leadership prototype. Paternalistic leaders act like a senior family member, are involved in subordinates' nonwork life, maintain authority and the status hierarchy, and expect strong loyalty and deference from subordinates (Aycan 2006). Paternalistic leadership is commonly found in the collectivistic and hierarchical cultures of Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa (see Pellegrini & Scandura 2008 for a review). Gelfand et al. (2007) suggest such leadership is typically endorsed when power distance and collectivism are high but is criticized with low power distance and individualism.

In their study, Aycan et al. (2013) examined the relationship between the paternalistic prototype and other leadership prototypes in six countries representing high power distance and collectivism (China, Turkey, and Pakistan) and low power distance and individualism (the United States, Germany, the Netherlands). Their findings revealed that in high power distance and collectivistic cultures, the paternalistic prototype converged more strongly with the authoritarian and so-called nurturant-task leadership prototypes than it did in egalitarian and individualistic cultures. This suggests congruence again, as paternalistic leaders' authoritarian and so-called performance-contingent-task behavior would be tolerated and expected more in high power distance cultures than in low power distance and collectivistic cultures, as it is part of the same prototype. Using the GLOBE data from 59 countries, Mansur et al. (2017) examined paternalistic

leadership acceptance around the world. Their results suggest that this form of leadership is indeed neither universally nor homogeneously endorsed. Also, there seem to be idiosyncratic shades of paternalism across cultures (that is, the enactment of paternalism can differ). Specifically, among the 22 societies that endorsed some form of paternalism, it was possible to distinguish between benevolent (caring) and exploitative paternalism (self-serving).

A new phase of GLOBE is currently being undertaken. However, there are also many studies that are not GLOBE related that address important questions around leadership and culture. For example, culture is often included as a potential moderator in the relationship between leadership styles or behaviors and outcomes, and below we provide an overview of this line of research.

CULTURE AS A MODERATOR

The literature on leadership to date has focused strongly on various broad leadership styles (i.e., sets of behaviors that are combined in an overall construct; for brevity we assume the reader is familiar with these well-known styles and do not define each of them). Much of this style research, especially on charismatic and transformational leadership, is criticized for lumping together conceptualizations and for examining multiple behaviors within a single construct (e.g., Carton 2022, Fischer & Sitkin 2023). While transformational leadership is mentioned most often, this criticism also holds for other styles, with, for example, servant, authentic, or ethical leadership also being often measured as a broad style combining several different perceived behaviors (see e.g., Brown et al. 2005, Kalshoven et al. 2011, Liden et al. 2008, Neider & Schriesheim 2011). When examining multiple behaviors within one construct, it becomes difficult to determine which behaviors are driving the results and which are not. This hampers drawing clear conclusions about the relationship between the construct and other variables (Carton 2022). This is also relevant in cross-cultural research, where specific behaviors may in addition hold differing cultural significance.

Also, scholars sometimes equate the measures used to study leadership with the actual outcomes of leadership itself. Van Knippenberg & Sitkin (2013) argue that this can yield flawed conclusions about the relationship between leadership and effects across contexts. In addition, there are often issues with establishing causality and endogeneity in this research. Generally, the issues of conceptualization, measurement, and causality that plague the broader leadership field have also not received sufficient attention in cross-cultural leadership research.

In cross-cultural research on leadership styles, studies also often focus on a limited number of countries. The number of countries included in many studies is limited to two or three. While these comparisons can be valuable for enhancing our understanding of leadership in different contexts, a limited representation of countries can result in findings that may lack generalizability and applicability to other cultural settings. This is especially true when the proposed underlying psychological mechanisms that relate to the expected differences between cultures are not measured (see Brockner 2003), which is often the case. While findings are often attributed to culture, if the reason they occur is not clear, the differences found might also be due to other differences between these specific countries. Below we provide several examples of such limited comparisons, although a full review of these studies is beyond our scope.

Hong et al. (2016) conducted a cross-sectional survey study among US and Korean employees. They classify the United States and Korea as examples of individualistic/low power distance and collectivistic/high power distance countries, respectively, based on Hofstede (2001). Task-oriented leadership related negatively with affective organizational commitment in the United States but positively in Korea. People-oriented leadership had a stronger positive relationship with commitment among US compared to Korean employees. The authors concluded that their

study confirms the general notion that the effects of leadership styles vary across countries. A similar study examined the relationships of transformational and transactional leadership with affective commitment among US and Korean employees (Cho et al. 2019). The results showed that the positive relationship between transformational leadership and commitment was stronger for US than for Korean employees, whereas transactional leadership was positively related to commitment only for Korean employees. However, in these studies whether culture drives these differences is unclear. The limited country sample and lack of measurement of the underlying psychological mechanisms prevent a definitive conclusion on the role of culture in observed differences.

Another example is a study by Pellegrini et al. (2010) who examined paternalistic leadership and its correlates in the United States and India. India is classified as a country with high collectivism and high power distance (Hofstede 2001). The authors found that job satisfaction was significantly related to paternalistic leadership among Indian workers but not among US workers. However, in both cultural contexts, paternalistic leadership related positively with leader–member exchange (LMX, discussed below) and commitment. The authors concluded that paternalistic leadership may potentially be a universal concept. However, this conclusion is based on a very limited number of countries, and other research on paternalism (see above) shows differences between cultures.

Although limited country studies may help to identify patterns that can enhance our understanding, and the outcomes of such studies can be of use in meta-analyses, we often do not know whether the results are related to culture or rather reflect other contextual differences between the countries involved. Conclusions may also vary depending on the specific cultural samples being examined. Culture effects are likely to be undervalued in homogeneous samples of countries due to the limited range of cultural diversity. A smaller sample that covers a wider range of countries may enable researchers to draw more accurate conclusions about culture than a larger sample consisting of mostly homogeneous countries. Therefore, careful consideration of the scope and diversity of countries included in research is important. Research in international business suggests that conclusions about the influence of cultural dimensions on meaningful relationships also depend on the estimated effect size and should probably not be drawn based on the analysis of cultural scores from fewer than 7–10 countries, even when the effect sizes are reasonably large (see Franke & Richey 2010 for their power calculations). In this review, we primarily focus on cross-cultural leadership research that includes samples from more countries whenever possible.

In reviewing this work on cultural dimensions as moderators of the relationship between leadership style and outcomes, we tentatively note whether the study findings seem in line with the aforementioned distinction by House et al. (1997) among the near universality, cultural congruence, and cultural difference propositions (see **Figure 2**). If one allows for functional universality (Bass 1997), as described above, findings can also show both some universality and some congruence or compensation. For instance, while a positive relationship between variables such as charisma and effectiveness may exist across cultures, suggesting the near universality of that relationship, in some cultures such an association might be stronger than in others (functional universality), and depending on whether that suggests congruence or compensation, there might be some evidence for either of these ideas. Whether the reviewed findings seem in line with the cultural fit/congruence or cultural difference/compensation proposition is summarized in the online **Supplemental Table**. While acknowledging some problems in both the conceptualization and the measurement of culture and leadership styles, we review these studies as these may provide a good starting point and background for researchers to develop hypotheses with the aim to (re)test those conceptualizations using more robust measures and study designs.

Supplemental Material >

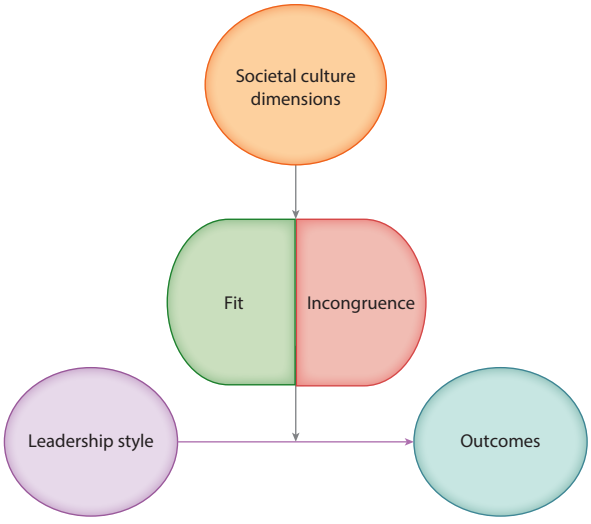

Figure 2

Moderating effects of societal culture on the link between leadership style and outcomes: fit versus incongruence.

Charismatic and Transformational Leadership

A lot of cross-cultural research has focused on charismatic and transformational leadership. According to GLOBE, the conduct of charismatic/value-based leaders is universally endorsed because the motivating visions communicated by these leaders and the moral principles upheld by them emphasize values that have a broad and inclusive appeal (in the GLOBE CEO study, for example, integrity is an element of what the researchers label value-based leadership). Similarly, Bass (1997) also emphasizes that overall, transformational leadership is valued around the world even if it is not enacted in the exact same way everywhere (for example, such visionary leaders can be more or less participative). However, in light of the critiques in relation to the broad operationalization of the charismatic/transformational leadership style (e.g., Carton 2022, Van Knippenberg & Sitkin 2013), it would be of value for future research to delve deeper into the specific behaviors involved in such leadership and study them separately across cultures. With these cautions in mind, we review what more recent studies find related to this style.

One study has already looked at a more specific operationalization of charisma across cultures. Specifically, Ernst et al. (2022) investigated charismatic leadership tactics in the United States, Austria, France, India, and Mexico, and they found that regardless of country, charismatic leadership tactics are effective (suggesting potential universality). The pattern of findings was consistent with a moderating role of uncertainty avoidance (cf. Hofstede 1980) on the link between charismatic leader tactics and extrarole performance. In the countries with higher uncertainty avoidance, where risk aversion tends to be higher (France and Mexico), charismatic leadership more strongly predicted participants' decision to complete an extra task. Because charismatic leader tactics are directly observed (coded), endogeneity is less of a problem in this study; however, the number of countries included in the analysis is rather low to allow for strong conclusions. The findings point toward functional universality, in that the relationship between charismatic leadership and performance is positive everywhere, but also some cultural compensation, with charismatic tactics being especially effective in helping to overcome the risk aversion or reluctance to change that are inherent in uncertainty avoidance.

Other studies use the available primary literature. For example, Watts et al. (2020) present a meta-analysis of studies on the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behavior across cultures. While the authors base themselves on the (flawed) overall measure used in the primary studies, their findings show functional universality and are also in line with the cultural compensation proposition. They find that supervisor transformational leadership is positively related to individual- and team-level innovation everywhere; yet the relationship is again somewhat stronger in countries with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance. This suggests that overall, employee innovation can be enhanced by investing in developing supervisors' ability to show transformational leadership [and combining this idea with Ernst et al.'s (2022) findings above, perhaps by investing in developing the charismatic leadership tactics], but that organizations operating in countries with more uncertainty avoidance may especially benefit from this enhancement.

Crede et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance [task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)] using data from over 200 studies from 34 countries. They found that cultural values and practices moderate the transformational leadership–employee performance relationship. For some dimensions (e.g., future orientation values) there was evidence for cultural fit. However, overall, the relationship appears stronger in countries whose culture is incongruent with transformational leadership (e.g., where uncertainty avoidance is higher), suggesting compensation.

Peng et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis examining the connection between transformational leadership and reactions to organizational change in Eastern and Western cultures. The study involved varying numbers of countries representing the two cultures, depending on the specific outcomes under investigation. In the Eastern (versus Western) cultural context, where power distance is typically higher and individualism is lower, transformational leadership exhibited a stronger correlation with commitment to change (positive effect) and resistance to change (negative effect). As culture did not moderate the link between transformational leadership and any of the other outcomes, these findings are partially aligned with the cultural difference or compensation idea.

Flatten et al. (2015) show that both transformational and transactional leadership have a positive impact on a firm's absorptive capacity, which pertains to its ability to explore and exploit external knowledge. These relationships are found to be moderated by Hofstede's power distance and uncertainty avoidance, as indicated by survey responses from CEOs or a member of their TMTs from 608 firms across multiple countries (Austria, Brazil, Germany, India, Singapore, and the United States). These findings are again in line with the cultural compensation proposition.

Jackson et al. (2013) meta-analytically investigated power distance and individualism/collectivism practices as moderators of the link between transformational/charismatic as well as transactional leadership and different forms of commitment. They found that some of these relationships were near universal and not affected by culture. Specifically, the positive relationship between transformational leadership and affective commitment was not moderated by culture, and neither was the relationship between contingent reward or management-by-exception and commitment. However, they did find that the impact of transformational leadership on increasing followers' sense of obligation to the organization (normative commitment) was stronger in collectivistic cultures, which seems in line with a cultural fit perspective given the collective focus of this leadership style.

Also, Bracht et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis linking multiple leadership constructs, including transformational leadership via social identification with innovative work behavior. They investigated in-group collectivism and power distance as moderators, using data from 23 countries

divided into nine cultural clusters. The indirect effect of transformational leadership was stronger in collectivistic countries, representing a fit perspective.

In sum, for charismatic and transformational leader behaviors, there is some evidence of universal relationships with outcomes such as affective commitment and innovation-related outcomes and some evidence of fit for other dimensions or outcomes (such as the stronger effects that several studies find for such leadership style in collective cultures). Yet, the evidence also clearly suggests that often a compensation mechanism is at play in the positive relationship of this change-oriented leader behavior with outcomes such as innovation and performance.

In addition to its generally positive outcomes, transformational leadership appears to have the capacity to mitigate constraints imposed by the cultural context that might otherwise hinder performance, innovation, and change. This is particularly evident in situations where uncertainty avoidance is high. This strong role of uncertainty avoidance was found in multiple studies, and the pattern of results indicates that while transformational leadership tends to relate positively to outcomes such as innovation across different cultural contexts, this type of leadership is particularly beneficial in cultures where pursuing change, experimentation, and risk taking are not as deeply ingrained in the culture. Of course, it would be of value to study transformational leadership further with more precise attention to the specific behaviors associated with transformational leadership, as it seems likely that it is mostly the visionary and charismatic elements of the broader style that would drive such effects.

Moral and Empowering Forms of Leadership

Attributes associated with morality were found to be universally endorsed (Den Hartog et al. 1999). There are several behavioral styles related to such attributes that are often referred to as morally focused leadership styles, including servant, ethical, and authentic leadership (Lemoine et al. 2019), and these have also been studied across cultures. In addition, we include empowering leadership here. Unfortunately, these broad moral styles suffer from similar conceptual and measurement issues as transformational leadership; however, the available studies do provide a starting point for theorizing and doing more rigorously designed work.

Most servant leadership research to date has been conducted in the Anglo culture cluster and in Western European contexts or in Confucian Asia. Several culture clusters remain underrepresented in this literature (Eastern Europe, Germanic Europe, Latin America, Middle East, Nordic region, and Sub-Saharan Africa). Neubert et al. (2022) provide meta-analytic evidence from 139 studies. They include both GLOBE cultural practices (how things are) and values (how things should be). Their results indicate that cultural practices that are congruent with servant leadership moderate the relationship of such leadership with effectiveness across cultures, suggesting fit. However, they also included the GLOBE cultural values, which yielded converse effects suggesting difference, which makes it hard to say whether the findings align with the cultural congruence or cultural difference perspective. This illustrates how the often inverse relationships between GLOBE cultural practices and values are hard to interpret.

Also, Lee et al. (2020b) tested whether country-level individualism and power distance moderated the relationship of servant leadership with employee outcomes. For most outcomes, culture dimensions did not moderate the positive relationships of servant leadership with outcomes. These findings are more in line with a near universal interpretation. Only the relationship of servant leadership with team performance, while overall positive, did differ in strength depending on culture (i.e., it was a functional universal). This relationship was found to be stronger in high power distance and high collectivistic cultures. This suggests compensation.

Zhang et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of the consequences of servant leadership and the moderating role of Hofstede's cultural dimensions examining studies that came mainly from

Asia and the United States. They found that the main effects of servant leadership on outcomes are significant overall; yet the effects do vary across cultures, as there was a (somewhat) weaker relationship with employee outcomes in contexts high in traditionality, power distance, and masculinity and low in individualism (suggesting culture fit). McCune Stein et al. (2020) performed a meta-analysis of servant leadership research (112 studies) comparing the effects in China with those in the Anglo-Saxon culture. Results show that there is no significant difference in effect sizes between Chinese and Anglo-Saxon employees for job performance, OCB, creative behavior, affective commitment, and job satisfaction. Again, this suggests near universality, although of course here there are only two clusters involved.

Overall, it seems that there are generally positive relationships between servant leadership and many outcomes, although at times the strength of these relationships varies, thus suggesting functional universality. It is not yet clear under which conditions a fit perspective or a compensation perspective applies for specific outcomes or cultural dimensions. This lack of clarity may arise from the broad nature of this leadership style, which encompasses multiple behaviors, and the relatively limited number of contexts in which this form of leadership has been studied.

Cross-cultural research on ethical leadership has also been limited. As noted, the aforementioned universally endorsed leadership characteristics include many that relate to ethical leadership—for example, leaders are expected to be just and have integrity. Thus, the core of ethical leadership is likely to be universal. Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck (2014) conducted interviews with executives from both Western and Eastern cultures to investigate the nuances in the enactment of ethical leadership in different cultures. The study revealed that across all cultures, a shared understanding of ethical leadership centered around a leader with high integrity who was honest, fair, and people-oriented and who led by example. However, in Eastern cultures, ethical leadership was also closely associated with leader modesty. This suggests ethical leadership forms a universal but may also be variform in terms of showing subtle differences in (preferred) enactment.

Quantitatively, Ng & Feldman (2015) compared the United States and Canada with Asian countries (e.g., China, Taiwan). Studies conducted in North America found stronger relationships of ethical leadership with transformational leadership and with the use of contingent rewards than did studies conducted in Asian countries (e.g., China, Taiwan). The findings again indicate that while ethical leadership might be universally endorsed, the specific enactment of ethical leader behavior may differ somewhat (i.e., variform universality).

Peng & Kim (2020) conducted a meta-analysis linking ethical leadership to task performance, OCB, and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) using Hofstede's cultural values as moderators. Evidence was found for a moderating role of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. A higher level of power distance was associated with a stronger positive relationship with OCB and a stronger negative relationship with CWB. In addition, the negative relationship between ethical leadership and CWB was stronger in cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance was also found to reduce the positive influence of ethical leadership on OCB. While this suggests functional universality and cultural fit, more work is needed to better understand differences in ethical leadership across cultures.

Another moral form of leadership is authentic leadership. Again, conceptual and measurement issues play a role in the definition of this style. Using Hofstede's country scores and studies that came mainly from Asia and the United States in their meta-analysis, Zhang et al. (2022) find inconsistent effects of power distance and collectivism on the link between authentic leadership and outcomes such as trust, turnover intentions, leader effectiveness, job performance, team performance, psychological safety, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and counterproductive work behavior. The aforementioned study by Bracht et al. (2023) finds a stronger effect for authentic leadership in collectivistic countries, representing a fit perspective.

Kim et al. (2018) studied the relationship between empowering leadership and outcomes in a meta-analysis. They compared the United States and Canada with South Korea and China and several other countries (Germany, Norway, Belgium, Middle East). Few differences were found between countries. However, Lee et al. (2020a) report a meta-analysis linking multiple leadership styles to creativity and innovation and explored the possible moderating role of power distance. Empowering leadership was found to be more strongly related to creativity in low power distance countries, which aligns with the fit perspective, whereas servant and supportive leadership showed stronger relationships with creativity and innovation in high power distance countries, which aligns with the cultural difference perspective.

Li et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis on the link between multiple leadership styles and employee engagement, investigating five cultural dimensions (gender egalitarianism, human orientation, performance orientation, future orientation, and power distance) as moderators in 45 countries. Most correlations of ethical and servant leadership with engagement were stable across cultural dimensions (i.e., near universal). Ethical and empowering leadership exhibited a stronger relationship with employee engagement in countries with a higher emphasis on future orientation. This aligns with the cultural fit perspective. On the other hand, servant leadership showed a stronger association with engagement in countries with lower levels of uncertainty avoidance, which aligns with the cultural difference perspective. This shows that the moral styles are often (functionally) universally related to positive outcomes, yet the strength of these relationships does differ. Whether this is in line with cultural congruence or difference depends on the specific leader behavior and culture dimensions under study.

Abusive Supervision

Evidence indicates that there are normative differences in the cultural acceptability of abusive supervision. While this style of leadership is expected to have a negative effect everywhere, in countries characterized by higher power distance the acceptance of strict leader behavior, including more hostile forms, is more culturally embedded. In line with this, Vogel et al. (2015) examined abusive supervision in Anglo and Confucian country clusters and found more negative effects for abusive supervision on justice perceptions in Anglo countries compared to Confucian countries. Rather than using culture dimensions as a moderator, the authors directly compared their two groups. This finding is in line with the functional universality and the fit perspectives. Also in line with this is some meta-analytic evidence. First, a meta-analysis of studies from 11 countries suggests that abusive supervision occurs more frequently in Asian countries than in the United States (Mackey et al. 2017). Also, Zhang & Liao (2015) compared Asia and North America and found that the correlations between abusive supervision and several outcomes are moderated by power distance—that is, the relationships with organization-related and supervisor-related deviance as well as turnover are stronger in countries with a lower level of power distance. For other outcomes such as satisfaction there were no significant differences. Thus, abusive supervision is universally disliked, and where differences in the strength of relationships occur, these are in line with a fit perspective.

Paternalistic Leadership

In the section on how culture affects what we expect of our leaders, we discussed that paternalistic leadership is typically endorsed in societies high on power distance and collectivism. Hiller et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis on paternalistic leadership using data from 14 countries. Due to a lack of available data from primary studies, so-called WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) and non-WEIRD societies cannot be reliably compared yet.

However, the authors found that even in societies where paternalistic leadership is more prevalent and acceptable, the strong control or authoritarianism dimension that is part of such leadership is consistently negatively related to creativity, citizenship, task performance, attitudes toward the leader, and job attitudes. The finding that this specific behavior has consistently negative effects aligns with the universally disliked characteristics associated with it, such as being dictatorial (Den Hartog et al. 1999). These characteristics are also recognized as elements of the leadership anti-prototype (Epitropaki & Martin 2005).

Leader–Member Exchange

Another often used leadership construct is LMX. Rockstuhl et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on the role of collectivism and power distance as moderators in the relationship of LMX with correlates. Results based on 282 independent samples from 23 countries grouped together in two clusters indicate that the relationships of LMX with OCB, job satisfaction, justice perceptions, turnover intentions, and leader trust are stronger in horizontal/individualistic (e.g., Western) contexts than in vertical/collectivistic (e.g., Asian) contexts, which tentatively (given that this study only considers two clusters) suggests compensation. However, culture does not affect the relationships of LMX with task performance, commitment, and transformational leadership. These seem more universal. The aforementioned meta-analysis by Bracht et al. (2023) linked LMX to innovative work behavior via social identification and found the indirect effect of LMX to be universal and stable across clusters. Taken together, these findings suggest that most relationships of LMX with outcomes show universality.

Overall, the positively valenced leadership styles tend to exhibit universality in that they have positive relationships with many desired outcomes in most cultures. This is true for charismatic/transformational leadership, moral styles, empowering leadership, and LMX. For abusive supervision, such relationships are universally negative. For some styles, universality may possibly be variform in the sense that subtle differences in the enactment of such styles might occur (e.g., for transformational or ethical leadership).

While the strength of some relationships between styles and outcomes is similar across cultures, for others the strength of the relationships of leadership styles with outcomes differs (i.e., functional universality). In some cases there is evidence for compensation (such as for transformational behaviors and uncertainty avoidance, as suggested by multiple studies) or fit (such as for abusive supervision and power distance, as suggested again by several studies). However, elsewhere the pattern is not yet clear or varies, and to gain further insight we likely need more specific predictions for the specific behaviors related to the broad styles and better theorizing around why differences occur and what the psychological mechanisms involved are. The culture dimensions that seem to matter a lot for the effects of different leadership behaviors and styles on outcomes are uncertainty avoidance and power distance, and these might be good starting points for such theorizing.

OTHER RECENT APPROACHES IN THE FIELD AND WHERE TO GO

While our review primarily centers on cross-cultural comparative research, other approaches are also beginning to emerge in the field. We discuss several prominent approaches, including identity leadership, followership, and leading multicultural teams. We also discuss some other promising areas for future research.

Identity Leadership

The social identity theory of leadership (Hogg 2001) has gained support in leadership research. It posits that leadership effectiveness depends on leaders and followers perceiving themselves as

integral components of a collective. Leaders promote group identity through supporting group interests, driving group values and norms, deciding on group membership, and shaping structures for both in-group and out-group experiences (Haslam et al. 2020; for a meta-analysis see Steffens et al. 2021). Van Dick et al. (2018) validated an assessment tool for identity leadership across cultures, studying samples from 20 countries. The tool gauges followers' perception of leaders' skills in shaping, representing, advancing, and embedding a shared social identity. As a result, research on identity leadership now has the ability to transcend geographical boundaries (Van Dick & Kerschreiter 2016), opening up avenues for future cross-cultural research in this field.

For example, identity leadership might be particularly relevant and impactful in collectivist countries such as China due to the emphasis on group harmony, shared values, and interconnectedness within these societies. Identity leadership, which emphasizes group cohesion and shared identity, could potentially be seen as less aligned with the individualistic values of autonomy and self-fulfillment that are highly esteemed in such cultures. Future research in this area seems promising.

Followership Across Cultures

Leadership and followership are, of course, strongly intertwined, and expectations rooted in culture are likely to affect both leader and follower behavior. However, cross-cultural work on followership is still limited, and more work on this would be of interest [see, e.g., the call that Lord et al. (2020) made in this regard]. A recent piece by Urbach et al. (2021) conceptually addresses how culture affects the expectations of the behavior of followers toward their leaders. The followership literature describes two perspectives on the beliefs individuals hold about what makes an effective follower, namely more passive versus more proactive implicit followership theories (IFTs) (e.g., Blair & Bligh 2018, Carsten & Uhl-Bien 2012). Do leaders want followers to be proactive and in charge at work or to be more reactive and docile, waiting for instructions? Urbach et al. (2021) suggest that the societal cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism, future orientation, and uncertainty avoidance shape individuals' IFTs and discuss how the resulting cross-cultural differences in individuals' IFTs relate to differences in how much proactivity followers are likely to show and how this proactivity is likely to be received by leaders.

For example, followers in high power distance cultures are more likely than those in more egalitarian societies to hold more passive IFTs, because they have been socialized into behaving according to their lower position in the hierarchy (Blair & Bligh 2018). Proactive work behavior challenges the status quo and can be perceived as dominant behavior. Such behavior is not compatible with high levels of power distance, because when power distance is high, employees are typically expected to take a more deferential position and follow the directives of their leaders and not to speak up or take charge on their own (Urbach et al. 2021). In contrast, cultural practices or values that emphasize individual agency and openness to change should socialize both leaders and followers toward having more proactive IFTs. For leadership, findings suggest that culture indirectly shapes leader behavior through shaping cultural expectations of leadership (i.e., CLTs). This likely also holds for follower behavior. How culture affects expectations of followership and, in turn, follower behavior and performance ratings is an interesting area for future research.

Leading Teams with Staff from Different Countries

Our focus has centered on cross-cultural comparative research on leadership in different cultures; however, in practice people increasingly work with people from different cultures or countries in their teams. In the comparative literature, leading culturally diverse teams or teams combining staff from different regions has so far received limited attention. Nonetheless, several studies

have examined such team interactions in intercultural contexts. These investigations concentrate on situations in which individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds collaborate on projects or in which expatriate employees operate in culturally distinct environments. For a comprehensive overview on cross-cultural interactions among expatriates and teams that work in international contexts we refer to Adler & Aycan (2018), who indeed call for more research on leadership in relation to multicultural teams.

Also, Seshadri & Elangovan (2019) provide an overview of research on leading geographically distributed teams, wherein members are dispersed in different locations across the globe and yet are working together toward a shared objective. The team leaders or managers of such teams are tasked not only with overseeing a team that might consist of individuals who are unfamiliar with each other but also with comprehending diverse cultural perspectives concerning work methods, values, and norms.

Lu et al. (2022) focus on the multicultural experiences of leaders. Their research indicates that extensive exposure to diverse cultures assists leaders in communicating with greater proficiency and enhances their effectiveness, particularly in situations involving multinational teams. Similarly, Lisak et al. (2016) show that diverse teams tend to follow leaders with a global mindset who make everyone feel included, set innovation goals together, and encourage open communication. When these leaders are in charge, teams achieve more innovation, especially when they are aware of their diverse cultures. Given the ongoing globalization, future research in this area is promising and timely.

Additional New Directions for Research

Future research may also examine topics that have not yet received much consideration, such as the role of emotions in cross-cultural leader–follower interactions. While there has been some cross-cultural work on leader emotional intelligence (EI) (e.g., Miao et al. 2018), the measurement of EI is problematic, and more detailed work on how culture affects leader and follower emotions seems warranted. Such research includes exploring the cultural boundaries that restrict the range of acceptable emotional behaviors exhibited by leaders. Additionally, researchers should investigate how culture moderates the impact of leaders' emotion-related behavior on followers, such as their passion for the vision. It would also be valuable to understand how leaders utilize emotions to facilitate team development among followers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Also, some researchers argue that leadership is a shared activity among team members, which provides intangible resources and increases motivation to share knowledge and take responsibility (Carson et al. 2007). Future cross-cultural research could consider studying alternatives that go beyond the traditional leader–follower dyad, and given the importance of collaboration in today's global organizations, investigating shared leadership cross-culturally is of interest. In addition, the reasons individuals are viewed as leaders or followers may vary cross-culturally, and the process of claiming and granting leadership roles holds promise for future cross-cultural research (DeRue & Ashford 2010).

Another interesting direction could be to examine nonlinear relationships in this field. Culture has primarily been conceptualized and evaluated as having linear effects, with limited exploration of alternative models. Advancements in our understanding of culture could be achieved by exploring nonlinear effects such as optimum levels and U-shaped effects, as demonstrated by Bullough et al. (2017) in their investigation of in-group collectivism and women's entrepreneurship.

Another intriguing area for future research lies in exploring gender and leadership in diverse cultural contexts. Wang et al. (2018), for example, found that a country's culture shapes the careers of female and male CEOs in different ways. Uncertainty avoidance exacerbates the obstacles that female CEOs face, while gender egalitarianism reduces them. Future research may also explore

how national culture influences attitudes toward diversity, perceptions of inclusive leadership, and the impact of cultural values on diversity-related practices and outcomes. Also, future studies could explore the concepts of culture strength and of intracultural diversity, which includes regional or community cultures.

SOME FINAL (METHODOLOGICAL) CONSIDERATIONS

Although there has been some advancement in the field, the investigation of cross-cultural leadership presents significant conceptual, but also methodological, challenges that need to be taken into account when interpreting current findings and designing future studies. Below we summarize some of these (without claiming to be exhaustive).

Increasing Multilevel Research

In cross-cultural leadership research, cultural values are often not directly assessed. While this approach offers several advantages—such as mitigating the potential for common source bias, incorporating culture as a moderator in meta-analyses, and enabling standardized measurement and comparability—it also presents certain disadvantages. For example, this approach may lead to an underestimation of the moderating effect of societal culture. It groups together individuals who can vary widely in their beliefs and values within any given country. Additionally, the accuracy of this approach at the country level depends on the representativeness of the original samples and could potentially result in misspecification. Also, this approach often does not explicate and operationalize the underlying psychological mechanisms that explain why and for whom culture has specific effects (cf. Brockner 2003).

Utilizing more multilevel techniques can be challenging but could represent a significant advancement in the field. This approach allows for the incorporation of cultural information from external variables at the country level. Furthermore, cultural values can also be measured at the individual respondent level within the study itself and then analyzed at multiple levels (e.g., Peterson et al. 2012). Collecting data on cultural variables in a study by asking respondents allows for more precision and for the use of such multilevel modeling. However, one should remember that individuals within a society vary on the cultural values they hold, and studies that involve specific groups of participants may not yield nationally representative results on the higher-level culture dimension. Individuals within a society (for example, in a specific profession) may thus hold cultural values that differ from the prevailing societal norm (Tsui et al. 2007). However, one of the main difficulties in researching cross-cultural leadership is determining how to measure and include the proposed underlying psychological mechanisms in cross-cultural research, and here multilevel approaches seem especially valuable.

Overall, and especially if one wishes to see the effect of a country-level variable on relationships among variables assessed at the individual level, we follow other authors in recommending the use of multilevel modeling approaches (see, e.g., Huang & Van de Vliert 2003, Peterson et al. 2012). For multilevel research to be robust, an adequate number of sampling units is required at both the individual and country level. Ideally, as suggested by Scherbaum & Ferreter (2009), a minimum of 30 countries should be included in a multilevel study to ensure statistical reliability. However, this is not always feasible. It is possible to partially offset a smaller number of countries by having a larger number of individuals per country.

Studies need to carefully try to control for confounding variables. If feasible, it would be of interest to use longitudinal designs and incorporate multiple sources or methods. To supplement cross-cultural surveys and assess competing explanations and mechanisms, the use of cross-lagged designs or instrumental variable techniques can provide insights into causal effects. Additionally, at

the individual level, experiments (Liou & Lan 2018) and simulation studies (Keyhani & Lévesque 2016) may form an interesting avenue to explore how and why cultural values affect leaders and followers. For example, Leung & Su (2004) conducted experiments in which they manipulated cultural values, while Oyserman & Lee (2007) primed cultural values. This could also be done in leadership research. While these findings would be an interesting addition to the field, whether they generalize to the societal level would need investigation.

Measurement

Measurement, meaning, and language are important to consider. Organizational concepts such as leadership, followership, control, and participation do not necessarily mean the same thing in every cultural context. For instance, Den Hartog & Dickson (2012) provide the example that in the Western world, participation usually refers to followers having influence on the outcome of a decision by taking part in it either formally or informally, whereas in Japan participation is traditionally used to refer to a consensus-oriented approach using bottom-up procedures and lobby consultations. Also, the literal translation of items or constructs can be problematic. While the terms follower and subordinate do not have a negative connotation in many societies, in a more egalitarian society such as the Netherlands, employees are not typically referred to as subordinates (*ondergeschikten*) but rather as coworkers (*medewerkers*); thus, in that context the less hierarchically valenced term coworker may be more appropriate as a translation of follower/subordinate and closer in intended meaning (Den Hartog & Dickson 2012). This illustrates that it is important to ensure that the measures used in the research are equivalent across different cultural contexts, which is often not thoroughly checked.

Complicating matters, culture is not static but is instead constantly evolving and changing. As an illustration, Pagda et al. (2021) conducted a study in Turkey that replicated the original GLOBE investigation. Their results show that while not all cultural practices had undergone significant transformations, some of them had changed, suggesting that culture may not be as stable as Hofstede (1980) originally proposed. However, the observed shifts were minor, indicating that cultural change may not occur rapidly. It could thus be helpful to use a dynamic approach to study culture that recognizes the changing nature of cultural practices and values over time. It may be that cultural practices change more rapidly than values; this, too, deserves attention.

Examining both cultural values (how things should be) and cultural practices (how things are) reflects that culture is not just a set of values or beliefs but also includes the practices, customs, and behaviors that reflect those values. As we have argued, cultural practices and cultural values can have different effects on the phenomena under study. Previous studies have attempted to explore these effects, and future research should continue to investigate this important topic (Karacay et al. 2019, Stephan & Pathak 2016). For example, recent research has introduced the concept of cultural dissonance, which refers to the divide between cultural values and the realities of everyday practices (Karacay et al. 2019). Research involving middle managers from seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa showed that the greater the cultural gap, the stronger the desire for leaders to serve as change agents and establish room for discussion. In other words, leaders may need to actively address and manage the cultural gap to effectively lead and bring about positive change within an organization or group. This forms an interesting avenue for further research.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings in the field of cross-cultural leadership are extensive and diverse. However, some of these findings, which are highlighted in **Table 4**, exhibit robust and generalizable patterns,

Table 4 Most generalizable findings from the cross-cultural leadership literature

Category	Insight(s)
Cultural expectations of leadership (CLTs)	- Culture affects (role) expectations people hold in society. - Culture indirectly shapes leader behavior through CLTs.
Universally endorsed leadership styles	- Charismatic, team-oriented, and moral elements of leadership are universally endorsed. - Subtle differences in the enactment of these styles might occur.
Varied endorsement of leadership styles	- Participative leadership is generally endorsed, with varying levels of endorsement across countries. - Human-oriented leadership can range from impeding to slightly facilitating outstanding leadership. - Autonomous leadership exhibits cross-cultural variations in endorsement.
Universally perceived as undesirable leadership style	- Self-protective leadership and abusive supervision are universally undesirable.
Do CEOs act in line with CLTs?	- Generally, yes; that also makes them more effective.
Culture as a moderator of leadership style and outcomes	- The cultural congruence proposition suggests that culture affects which leader behaviors are accepted, enacted, and deemed effective in societies. Leaders who adapt their behaviors to fit cultural norms and values are likely to be more effective. - The cultural difference or cultural compensation proposition suggests that leaders can sometimes be effective by deviating from prevailing cultural norms and values. - There is some evidence for both these perspectives as well as near universality.
Transformational leadership	- Transformational leadership is effective for innovation and change, especially in high uncertainty avoidance cultures.
Overall	- Positively valenced leadership styles (charismatic/transformational, moral styles, empowering, and leader–member exchange) tend to exhibit universality (positive relationships with desired outcomes in most cultures). For abusive supervision, such relationships are universally negative. Universality is likely variform, as differences in the enactment of styles might occur.

offering practical implications as illustrated in **Table 5**. Many of these have to do with developing a more nuanced perspective on training. First, the evidence suggests that there are some near universals with positively valenced leadership, such as transformational and moral forms of leadership, relating positively to desired work outcomes around the world and abusive supervision universally relating negatively to such outcomes. Thus, leadership training enhancing positive styles and reducing negative styles should help organizations everywhere.

Yet, for a change-oriented form of leadership such as transformational leadership, the results suggest that such leadership is especially effective in relation to innovation and change in cultures that have some impediments to overcome related to change (e.g., high uncertainty avoidance). Thus, the findings suggest that while training leaders to exhibit more such behaviors can benefit organizations everywhere, this is especially so when uncertainty avoidance is high. However, in cultures where such leadership is especially needed and effective, risk taking and a focus on change are less likely to be accepted, and thus, ironically, such change-oriented leadership may be less likely to be reinforced or rewarded there.

Also, while training often focuses on making people understand the existing cultural dimensions, the effect of societal culture on leader behavior is indirect. The reviewed research on culturally endorsed implicit theories suggests that culture affects the (role) expectations people hold in society. The culturally endorsed implicit theories of leadership, and likely also of followership, are what drives exhibited behaviors and rewards. When the exhibited leadership (and followership) behavior is in line with the expectations of leaders and followers in a given culture, this tends to have positive outcomes.

Table 5 Practical recommendations based on cross-cultural leadership literature

Recommendation	Key Points
Leadership training	- Enhance positive leadership styles (e.g., transformational and moral). - Reduce negative leadership styles (e.g., abusive supervision) for improved work outcomes globally.
Adapt leadership to cultural context	- Stimulate transformational leadership universally to enhance performance, innovation, and change, especially in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. - Emphasize change-oriented leadership in high uncertainty avoidance cultures but be mindful of potential acceptance issues affecting reinforcement and rewards.
Align leadership behavior with cultural expectations	- Understand role expectations driven by culturally endorsed implicit theories. - Modify leadership behavior to align with cultural expectations for positive outcomes.
Focus on subcultures and organizational culture	- Look into and adapt to major subcultures within a society as they can be significant in shaping leadership expectations. - Take into consideration that organizational culture can have a stronger and more direct influence on leadership expectations than societal culture. - Build organizational values and practices to shape leadership and follower expectations aligned with organizational goals.
Enhance global mindset and cultural sensitivity	- Provide training for leaders to develop a global mindset and cultural sensitivity. - Promote adaptability to navigate cultural differences successfully.
Overall	- Pursue options to enhance alignment between leadership behavior and cultural expectations. - Develop a nuanced perspective on leadership training to fit different cultural contexts.

Organizations can thus pursue several options to enhance such alignment. First, they can examine what is typically expected of leaders in the societies they are operating in to help their leaders understand how they can modify their behavior to fit better with such expectations. Second, they can try to find other ways in which they can alter such expectations. There are often differences in values between individuals and groups in any given country, and societal culture is not the only thing affecting the expectations that individuals hold of leaders and followers. Thus, understanding subcultures that might be predominant in a profession might sometimes be more important than focusing exclusively on societal culture. While organizational culture was not our focus here, some of the research we reviewed does suggest that the effects of organizational culture on leadership expectations in the organization often are stronger and more direct than those of societal culture (see, e.g., Dorfman et al. 2004). This implies that organizations may also be able to overcome potential barriers or to influence the expectations that are dominant in societal culture through carefully building a set of organizational values and practices that shape the expectations of leaders and followers in their organization in ways that might be more conducive to achieving organizational goals.

Finally, work on multicultural teams suggests that organizations can also enhance leadership effectiveness by providing training that helps leaders develop a global mindset or cultural sensitivity and adaptability to navigate cultural differences successfully. This, in turn, can contribute to more effective leadership, improved intercultural collaboration, and enhanced organizational performance within diverse cultural contexts, which is much needed in our increasingly diverse and global organizational landscape.

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